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Classical and Early Modern Paradoxes in England

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A Feast of Strange Opinions: Classical and Early Modern Paradoxes on the English Renaissance Stage

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and Emanuel Stelzer

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CEMP - Classical and Early Modern Paradoxes in England

The series of CEMP volumes offers studies and fully annotated scholarly editions related to the CEMP open-access digital archive. This archive includes texts pertaining to the genres of the paradox, of the paradoxical fiction, and of the problem, which were published in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, and which are currently unavailable online and/or not open access (https://dh.dlls.univr.it/bib-arc/cemp). Our digital archive features diplomatic, semidiplomatic, and modernised editions of selected works, furnished with critical apparatuses and editorial notes, alongside related documentary materials, which, in turn, are relevant to poetic and dramatic texts of the English Renaissance. These texts provide fundamental testimony of the early modern episteme, functioning as a hinge joining widespread forms of the paradoxical discourse in different genres and texts and within the development of sceptical thinking.

The project is part of the Skenè Centre as well as of the Project of Excellence Digital humanities applied to foreign languages and literatures (2018-2022) Department of Foreign Languages and Literature at the University of Verona (https://dh.dlls.univr.it/en/).

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1. Ancient Paradoxical Culture and Drama

1

The Paradox of 'Making the Weaker Speech the Stronger': on Aristophanes' *Clouds*, 889-1114

Alessandro Stavru

Abstract

In this paper, I deal with a much-discussed passage of Aristophanes' *Clouds*, namely the contest between two *dramatis personae* of the play – the *Stronger Speech* and the *Weaker Speech* (889-1114). This part of the play contains paradoxical features since the aim of both contestants is to overturn the arguments of the other. The contest ends with the paradoxical triumph of the Weaker Speech and the defeat of the Stronger Speech: the Stronger Speech surrenders and switches over to the other side, that is, to the Weaker Speech. This switching over, or change in identity, has been perceived as paradoxical ever since antiquity: in his *Apology*, written decades after Aristophanes' *Clouds*, Plato recalls this play as the comedy in which Socrates "made the worse argument the stronger" (*Ap.* 18a-c). Kenneth Dover demonstrated that the contest between the two speeches deals with two opposing models of education that are themselves paradoxical: old vs new education. Old education propounds the age-old value of temperance (*sophrosyne*), but its obsession with homosexual voyeurism makes it incapable of upholding this value. New education, on the other hand, differs strikingly from the ascetic education taught within Socrates' school as it pleads for an unbridled life of pleasure. My essay attempts at making sense of the paradoxical features of the passage. I claim that the two speeches stand for different stages of Socratic education. Both represent ideas of education that are characteristic of fifth-century Athens. Whilst Socratic education is, on the one hand, the evolution of the educational system propounded by the Stronger Speech (i.e. the age-old education of the 'Heroes of Marathon'), on the other, it forms the bedrock of the new education peculiar to the Weaker Speech (i.e. the education of the younger generation, such as that of Socrates' most renowned pupil, Alcibiades).

Keywords: Aristophanes; *Clouds*; Socrates; education; *sophrosyne*; *euryproktosyne*

1. The Stronger and the Weaker Speech

In this essay, I deal with a much-discussed passage of Aristophanes' *Clouds*, namely the contest between two *dramatis personae* of the play: the *Stronger Speech* and the *Weaker Speech* (889-1114).[1] Ancient sources suggest that this section of *Clouds* did not belong to the original version of the play, which was performed in 423 BC.[2] According to an ancient *hypothesis*, the contest of the two speeches that came down to us was added some years later (somewhere between 420 and 417), together with the parabasis of the chorus (518-562) and the burning of Socrates' school at the end of the play (1483-1511).[3] Although the two speeches are also mentioned in parts of the comedy that likely belonged to the first version of the play (see 112-6, 243-4, 657, 886, 1336-7, 1444-5, 1451-2), it seems probable that the contest between them did not appear in the first version.[4]

1 It should be noted that most ancient sources (the *dramatis personae*, the *scholia*, the *hypotheseis*, the *sigla* etc.) distinguish between a *just* (*dikaios*) and an *unjust* (*adikos*) speech. It is likely, however, that just and unjust are the result of late corrections (see Del Corno 1996, 293-4), and that the original names were *stronger* and *weaker* since these terms are used at 112-3, 893-4 and 1337-8, as well as in the scholia to RVE at 889 and 891. For a discussion on the passage, see Erbse 1954, 391-402; Strauss 1966, 29-39; Dover 1968, 209-30, lvii-lxvi, xc-xciii; Curiazi 1978, Stone 1980, Nussbaum 1980, 50-67; O'Regan, 89-105; Newiger 2000, 134-55; Casanova 2006, 165-9; Casanova 2007, 84-95; Cerri 2012, 171-4; Quinalha 2012, 99-102; Corradi 2013, 72-5 and 2018, 86-7; and Rossetti 2023, 13-14.

2 For hypotheses on the plot of the first version of *Clouds*, see Heidhues 1897, 14-25; Gelzer 1956, 138-40; Dover 1968, lxxx-xcviii; Hubbard 1986; and Tarrant 1991.

3 See Hypothesis 1 Dover (Dover 1968, 1; lxxx-xcviii = Hypothesis 5 Wilson = Hypothesis 7 Coulon).

4 I depart here from Dover, who thinks that the first version of *Clouds* also featured a contest between the two speeches. According to Dover these were not, however, personified as *human* characters (as in *Clouds* 2), but "brought on [stage] as fighting-cocks" (Dover 1968, xc; see also xci-xciii). If Dover is right, and the contest did feature, then it must have differed greatly from the one that eventually came down to us, which centres on the sexual features of the two speeches. It is obvious that these features only apply to humans, and not to cocks (cf. esp. 973-8; for more on these verses, see below). To my mind, the reconstruction by Russo 1962 is more

As Dover has shown, "the contest is focused on education", and "we should probably believe that in the 420's an old system of education [personified by the Stronger Speech] was yielding to a new system [personified by the Weaker Speech]" (see Dover 1968, lviii). It is important to pinpoint that the two educational systems in question are connected: the Stronger Speech is *old* because it precedes and, in some way, lays the foundation for the *new* Weaker Speech. The two speeches are both personified as male characters: the education systems these male *personae* represent are not, therefore, abstract ideas of *paideia*, but instead refer to Greek tradition, that is, to how all young male citizens should be brought up. According to these ideas, the education system relates to the relationship between an older male (the lover/teacher) and a younger male (the beloved/pupil – see esp. Dover 1989 and Percy 1996), as also seems to be implied in the contest between the two speeches: the two speeches have specific sexual needs and appear to deal with them in specific ways. Indeed, the two systems have characteristics that at first sight seem to be at odds:

1) The Stronger Speech derives his name from the physical hardiness, the training, the health and the strength he stands for (984-99). He personifies traditional values such as respect for parents and elders, justice and chastity, and temperance (981-3).

> κἀπιστήσει μισεῖν ἀγορὰν καὶ βαλανείων ἀπέχεσθαι,
> καὶ τοῖς αἰσχροῖς αἰσχύνεσθαι κἂν σκώπτῃ τίς σε φλέγεσθαι,
> καὶ τῶν θάκων τοῖς πρεσβυτέροις ὑπανίστασθαι προσιοῦσιν,

convincing: he believes that the first version of *Clouds* featured a dialogue between Chaerephon and Pheidippides rather than the contest between the two speeches. This reconstruction makes sense since such a dialogue must have existed somewhere in *Clouds* 1 (even Dover 1968, xcv-xcvi, must admit that "neither in 104 nor in 1465 does the prominence given to Chaerephon serve by itself any discernible humorous or dramatic purpose; rather, this prominence takes for granted the existence in the play of a scene or scenes which do not in fact exist elsewhere"). At 1465, Strepsiades calls Chaerephon "abominable" (μιαρός), which does not make sense if we look at the plot of the actual comedy (i.e., Chaerephon never behaves in a way to justify such an accusation). On the contrary, the accusation perfectly fits if we surmise that in *Clouds* 1 Chaerephon took charge of educating Pheidippides.

> καὶ μὴ περὶ τοὺς σαυτοῦ γονέας σκαιουργεῖν, ἄλλο τε μηδὲν αἰσχρὸν ποιεῖν ὅτι τῆς Αἰδοῦς μέλλεις τἄγαλμ' ἀναπλήσειν·
>
> [You will know how to hate the Agora and shun the bathhouses, to be ashamed of what is shameful, and to give up your seats to your elders when they approach, and not to act rudely towards your own parents, nor to do anything else disgraceful that would defile the Statue of Respect. (990-5, trans. Sommerstein, adapted)]

The Stronger Speech pursues the ideal of age-old education going back to the "Heroes of Marathon" (986). He identifies with traditional music and poetry (966-72), but he has no rhetorical capabilities (esp. 1088 and 1102). Thus, a paradoxical feature of the Stronger Speech now arises: although he respects the law, rules and moral conventions, and openly pursues the enforcements of the prohibitions linked to them, at the end of the contest he ends up being chastised because of his own behaviours since he is unable to defend himself against the accusations being levelled against him (1083-4). Indeed, it soon turns out that the Stronger Speech's praise of temperance (*sophrosyne*, at 962 and 1006; see also 1027, 1060, 1067, and 1071)[5] is unsubstantiated. Whilst defending traditional values, he desperately longs for sexual pleasure. He is sexually repressed since his ideology impedes him from satisfying his sexual appetite. But, as we will see, this only applies to male homosexuality (961-1023).[6] In the heterosexual sphere (1063-82), the values the Stronger Speech stands for are ineffective: he is unable to restrain himself, and his adulterous behaviour incurs violent punishment (1083-4).[7]

5 *Sophrosune* is a key virtue in male homosexual relationships between young boys and adult men (as in the case of the contest between the Weaker and the Stronger Speeches). Young boys should be modest, coy and shy towards elder men; the latter should, on the other hand, be chaste towards the younger and avoid sexual intercourse with them. On the conventions of male homosexuality, see Bethe 1907, Kroll 1921, Dover 1964 and 1973, Devereux 1968, Reynan 1967, Eyben 1972, Henderson 1991, 204-209.

6 As Henderson notes, male homosexuality was common in Doric Greece. In Attica, its social status was far less popular. In Old Comedy, there is no sympathy for homosexual behaviour: in Aristophanes and other comic playwrights, the normal sexual state is considered to be heterosexuality (Henderson 1991, 208-9).

7 It is interesting to note that the Stronger Speech *persona* first distances

2) The Weaker Speech stands for the neglect of physical condition and the lack of physical exercise. He praises physical enfeeblement, warm baths and warm clothing. He has no respect for parents or elders. He systematically violates the age-old rules of morality, and stands, therefore, for *physis* (nature) against *nomos* (law).[8] He also stands for sexual promiscuity, namely for the satisfaction of the unbridled "necessities of nature" (*tas tes physeos anankas*, at 1075). These should always be pursued – even unlawfully – and achieved through tactics of persuasion. Contrary to the Stronger Speech's praise of sexual restraint, the Weaker Speech overtly boasts about his unbridled sex drive: his virtue consists not in *sophrosyne* (temperance), as we will see, but in *euryproktosyne* ("having a wide ass", at 1085-1100). Thanks to his mastery of sophistic speech, he is able to prove his innocence even when found guilty. Therefore, the Weaker Speech's name derives from his ability to subvert established truths and values, to take on lost cases and successfully defend them:

> ἐγὼ γὰρ ἥττων μὲν λόγος δι' αὐτὸ τοῦτ' ἐκλήθην
> ἐν τοῖσι φροντισταῖσιν, ὅτι πρώτιστος ἐπενόησα
> τοῖσιν νόμοις καὶ ταῖς δίκαις τἀναντί' ἀντιλέξαι.
> καὶ τοῦτο πλεῖν ἢ μυρίων ἔστ' ἄξιον στατήρων,
> αἱρούμενον τοὺς ἥττονας λόγους ἔπειτα νικᾶν.
>
> [For it was just for this reason that I got the name of Weaker Speech among men of thought, because I was the first who conceived the notion of arguing in contradiction to established values and justified pleas. And that is worth more than ten thousand staters? To be able to choose the inferior case and yet win. (1039-43; trans. Sommerstein adapted)]

himself from heterosexual sex (996-7), but then, tempted by adultery, is incapable of refraining from it (1080-2). This alone makes it clear that the Stronger Speech is far from strong; his *sophrosyne* is too weak to withstand the temptation of pleasure.

8 This matches with what we know about two major sophists, namely Callicles and Antiphon: both of them propound *physis* against *nomos* (for Callicles, *physis* corresponds to the right of the stronger; for Antiphon, to self-interest). For an overview, see Guthrie 1971, 101-16.

An important feature the two speeches have in common is that they both long for pleasure (*hedone*). The Weaker Speech overtly does so by pursuing the "necessities of nature", i.e. hedonism of the most basic sort. The Stronger Speech, on the contrary, praises temperance (*sophrosyne*) at first. When confronted with good-looking, well-trained young boys, however, his obsession with sex shows.[9] As Dover claims, the Stronger Speech points out virtuous behaviour by dreamily dwelling on the young boys' genitals (989, 1014):

> ἐν παιδοτρίβου δὲ καθίζοντας τὸν μηρὸν ἔδει προβαλέσθαι
> τοὺς παῖδας, ὅπως τοῖς ἔξωθεν μηδὲν δείξειαν ἀπηνές·
> εἶτ' αὖ πάλιν αὖθις ἀνιστάμενον συμψῆσαι καὶ προνοεῖσθαι
> εἴδωλον τοῖσιν ἐρασταῖσιν τῆς ἥβης μὴ καταλείπειν.
> ἠλείψατο δ' ἂν τοὐμφαλοῦ οὐδεὶς παῖς ὑπένερθεν τότ' ἄν,
> ὥστε τοῖς αἰδοίοισι δρόσος καὶ χνοῦς ὥσπερ μήλοισιν ἐπήνθει.
>
> [When the boys sat down in the gymnastic, they had to cover themselves with their thighs so as not to expose anything to the onlookers that would be "cruel" (*apenes*); and then, when they stood up again, they had to smooth off the sand, and take care not to leave behind for their lovers the impress (*eidolon*) of their manhood. Also, in those days, no boy would anoint himself below the navel, and so on their *pudenda* (*tois aidoioisi*) the dew and the fluff were blooming like on fruits. (973-8, trans. Sommerstein, adapted)]

The boys should cover their genitals whilst sitting, since the direct sight of them would be "cruel" for the onlookers. But even the indirect sight of them is a potential danger. When they stand up, the boys should carefully erase any impression of their genitals on the ground, so as to avoid tormenting those who might spot them.[10] Last but not least, the Stronger Speech dwells on the liquid and the soft pubic hair (*drosos kai khnous*)[11] on the

9 See Dover 1968, lxv, and Del Corno 1996, 301-3.

10 It has been noted that this passage resembles a Pythagorean *akousma*, according to which the shape of the body impressed upon linens should be erased when one gets up from the bed in the morning: see Hewitt 1935.

11 The paederotic context of the expression δρόσος καὶ χνοῦς is patent. According to Dover, δρόσος may refer here to Cowper's secretion, i.e. the liquid "that is emitted when the penis is erect" (Dover 1968, 217). This reading does not fit with 1012-15, where the Stronger Speech describes the physical

genitals themselves, comparing them to glowing apples. Here the description imperceptibly moves from the visual to the tactile sphere, since the dewy and soft genitals of the young boys can not only be seen, but also be touched. This is at odds with what we are told in the previous verses: if the sight of the genitals is "cruel" and should therefore be avoided, why does the Stronger Speech dwell on details that, from his viewpoint, should be even more cruel? It seems clear that Aristophanes is outlining, in a joking manner, the Stronger Speech's weakness: although he praises self-control in matters of sex and does not want to see the young boys' genitals, he ends up visualising details that imply not only touching, but also, quite possibly, caressing them. His sexual repression is, therefore, complete: both on the visual and on the tactile level, he dreams a desire he cannot satisfy.

The Stronger Speech follows the conventional rules of traditional male *paideia*, which hinder him from openly pursuing his desires. As Dover poignantly observes, he is a "homosexual voyerist"[12], who

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features of the young boys who spend their time in palaestras: "[you will have] a shining breast, a bright skin, big shoulders, a minute tongue, a big ass and a small prick (κωλῆν μικράν)" (trans. Sommerstein, adapted). Here it is evident that the young boys praised by the Stronger Speech have small (i.e. non-erect) genitals because they are busy practicing gymnastics. This also seems to be the case at 977, where the reference to the "anointment" (ἠλείψατο) of the young boys also points to an athletic, and not to an erotic, context. Jeffrey Henderson provides a more likely explanation of these verses. He claims that "dewiness is frequently associated by the Greeks with freshness and innocence, which are clearly wanted in our passage". Henderson believes that the expression δρόσος καὶ χνοῦς should be taken as a hendiadys referring to the fact that "the pubic down of boys is not artificially oiled but naturally dewy, like the surface of fruits (μήλοισιν), because of the boys' athletic sweat" (Henderson, 145n194).

12 See Dover 1968, lxv. The Stronger Speech's (homo-)sexual voyeurism is also evident at 964-6 ("the boys of the neighbourhood . . . wore no cloaks, even if it was snowing as thick as barley groats. Then again, the music teacher would teach them . . . not to keep their thighs together"), 988-9 ("the pupils of the Weaker Speech make me [i.e. the Stronger Speech] choke with rage, when they dance at the Panathenaea, and one of them holds his shield in front of his ham, caring nothing for Tritogeneia"), 1014-18 ([the Stronger Speech on those who follow his advice] "[you'll have] a small tongue, a big rump, a small prick" . . . [and on those who do not follow his advice] "[you'll

is unable to satisfy his erotic needs. Indeed, the Stronger Speech values *hedone* as the Weaker Speech does, but is unfit to pursue it because of the restrictions imposed by moral conventions. The two speeches have different ethical stances: the Stronger Speech values *nomos* over *physis*, while the Weaker Speech values *physis* over *nomos*. Both long for *hedone*: the Stronger Speech craves *hedone* but is unable to obtain it in the homosexual sphere because of the restrictions imposed by *nomos* (and/or his inability to circumvent them); the Weaker Speech also longs for *hedone* and has unlimited access to it due to his ability to circumvent all rules and conventions imposed by *nomos*.

2. Socratic Education and the Power of *Logos*

Both speeches stand for values and behaviours that at first sight appear to be at odds with what Aristophanes presents as 'Socratic education'. Such education has ascetic traits that do not match with either the repressive longing for pleasure of the Stronger Speech or the unbridled satisfaction of pleasure of the Weaker Speech. In *Clouds*, Socrates' new pupil Strepsiades must endure cold and hunger as well as refrain from pleasure:

> τὸ ταλαίπωρον ἔνεστιν
> ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ καὶ μὴ κάμνεις μήθ' ἑστὼς μήτε βαδίζων
> μήτε ῥιγῶν ἄχθει λίαν μήτ' ἀριστᾶν ἐπιθυμεῖς
> οἴνου τ' ἀπέχει καὶ γυμνασίων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀνοήτων
>
> [If there is endurance in your soul, if neither standing nor walking tires you, if you are not too put out by being cold or yearn for your breakfast, if you abstain from wine and physical exercise and all other follies . . . (414-17, trans. Sommerstein)]

Strepsiades is willing to suffer all possible physical pain. His hope is that the discipline he is going to acquire in the *phrontisterion* will provide him with the eristic skills that will enable him to ward off the creditors that haunt him:

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have] a big tongue, a small rump, a big ham").

> τουτὶ τό γ' ἐμὸν σῶμ' αὐτοῖσιν
> παρέχω τύπτειν, πεινῆν, διψῆν,
> αὐχμεῖν, ῥιγῶν, ἀσκὸν δείρειν,
> εἴπερ τὰ χρέα διαφευξοῦμαι
>
> [So now I unconditionally deliver to them this body of mine to be beaten, to hunger, to thirst, to be dirty, to freeze, to be flayed with a wineskin, if only I can escape my debts . . . (439-43, trans. Sommerstein)]

The ascetic features outlined in *Clouds* fit with what we see in *Birds*, a comedy staged nine years later. Here Socratic education is characterised as a *mania*, a "craze" for Spartan ways (*lakonomania*):

> Πρὶν μὲν γὰρ οἰκίσαι σε τήνδε τὴν πόλιν, ἐλακωνομάνουν ἅπαντες ἄνθρωποι τότε, ἐκόμων, ἐπείνων, ἐρρύπων, ἐσωκράτων, σκυτάλι' ἐφόρουν
>
> [Some time ago . . . all humans had a craze for Spartan ways – long hair, starvation, no washing, they behaved like Socrates, carrying round those curious message-sticks. (1280-3; trans. Halliwell adapted)]

We know from fourth-century sources that the ethical values advocated by Socrates and his entourage do in fact match with those of Spartan asceticism. Antisthenes, Xenophon and other Socratics deal at length with Socrates' ascetic features, especially with strength (*iskhys*), endurance (*karteria*) and self-control (*enkrateia*). These values prove to be *stronger* than *hedone*.[13] They are, therefore,

13 *Iskhys* is a typical Socratic virtue according to Antisthenes. A much-discussed fragment states that "virtue is self-sufficient for happiness, needing nothing in addition except for Socratic strength" (*SSR* 5 A 134, 2-5 = DL 6.10-11 = Prince 2015, 388-94). According to Plato, *iskhys* is a quality of an episteme which is stronger that *hedone* (Pl. *Prt.* 352b). Chantraine (1990, 578-9) conjectures that both *karteria* and *enkrateia* could be etymologically related to the name *Sokrates*. In fact, fourth-century sources clearly show that both qualities are related to Socrates. Their difference lies in the fact that *karteria* enables the endurance of potentially harmful external agents (such as heat, cold, fatigue etc.), whereas *enkrateia* provides resistance against the temptations of sex, sleep, food and drink (see Pl. *Smp.* 216c-221b; Xenoph. *Mem.* 1.2.1-5, 1.6.6-8, 2.1.18-20, 2.6.22, 4.5.8-9, *Smp.* 8.8, *Ap.* 25, Oec. 5.4). The main texts dealing with this topic have been gathered together in Boys-

a step beyond the temperance (*sophrosyne*) praised by the Stronger Speech, which is *too weak* to withstand the temptations of *hedone*.

The most evident example of Socratic asceticism is Chaerephon, one of Socrates' most intimate associates according to Aristophanes.[14] In *Clouds*, Chaerephon is depicted as being very close to Socrates. He assists Socrates in performing various duties within his school. He is "half-dead" (*hemithnes*, at 504), a definition which hints at the radical asceticism practiced within the *phrontisterion*. Aristophanes lampoons Socrates' "care of the soul" (*epimeleia tes psyches*) as a dieting regime that aims to transform Socrates' pupils into Homeric ghosts of the dead (*psychai*).[15] In fact, Aristophanes ridicules the school of Socrates as "the thinkery of wise ghosts" (*psychon sophon . . . phrontisterion*, at 94). In *Birds*, Chaerephon is a *nykteris*, an infernal bat that "arises from below" (*anelthe katothen*, at 1563) and goes "after blood" (*pros to laima*, at 1564) – exactly like the underworldly *psychai* featured in the *Odyssey*.[16] He is not really alive, but not even dead: he resembles, but is not altogether, an underworldly ghost (*psyche*).[17] Thanks to Socrates' necromantic ability (*psychagogein*, at 1555), he is capable of dwelling in both the underworld and the upperworld: hence his hybrid status.

The failure of the Stronger Speech, who is unable to uphold the virtue he claims to pursue, is the failure of a whole generation. As we have seen, the Stronger Speech celebrates the age-old values of

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Stones & Rowe 2013, 66, 72-5 and 105-10.

14 It should be noted that Chaerephon is the only follower of Socrates to be named. This entails that he was a known figure in Athens when he was put on stage, i.e. in *Clouds* (423), *Wasps* (434), and *Birds* (414). Even in Plato, Chaerephon is depicted as a close associate of Socrates. In *Apology*, he consults the oracle about Socrates' wisdom: see 21a-b. Chaerephon is also a character in Plato's *Gorgias*. See Moore 2013, 284-5 and 296; Brisson 1996, 304-5; and Nails 2002, 86-7.

15 Havelock 1972, 15-16, shows that the *psychai* of Socrates and the Socratics in *Clouds* should be identified with the ghosts of the underworld featured in the *Odyssey* (cf. Sarri 1975, 115-6).

16 See *Od.* 11.43-51, cfr. 24.6-8.

17 When *Birds* was performed in 414, Chaerephon was still alive: see Plat. *Ap.* 21a, according to which Chaerephon was exiled in 404 by the Thirty Tyrants together with other democrats. He came back to Athens in 403. On Chaerephon, see n4.

the generation of the 'Heroes of Marathon'. All these values, namely respecting parents and elders, justice and chastity, are encompassed by the virtue of *sophrosyne*. The contest between the two speeches shows that *sophrosyne*, and all values connected with it, are old-fashioned and out-dated because they are incapable of providing a reliable guide in situations in which *hedone* is strong and tempting. This matches with what we see in Socratic literature, where the Marathon Heroes Themistocles and Miltiades are criticised for the ineffectiveness of their virtues as well as for their inability to account for them.[18]

The Weaker Speech, on the contrary, does not care about virtue. He is free from the constraints induced by a traditional understanding of moral turpitude (*aiskhron*, 1078). The education he propounds aims at developing, through exercise (*askein*, 1059), specific rhetorical skills that enable him to get away with unlawful behaviours. Thanks to his eristic ability, he is able to circumvent the established social rules and thus lead a life of unlimited licentiousness (*hybris*, 1068) and pleasure (*hedy*, 1069).

Aristophanes' paradoxical exaggeration is of great interest since it highlights a crucial difference between the traditional *paideia* defended by the Stronger Speech and the new education propounded by the Weaker Speech. Traditional *paideia* centres on rules and ethical conventions, while the new education system aims at circumventing and breaking these very rules. Traditional *paideia* defends *gymnastike*, a physical training that aims to attain the aristocratic values of *kalokagathia*; the new education system, on the contrary, negates *gymnastike* and praises asceticism instead. Such asceticism also involves training, but of an intellectual kind: its aim is not *kalokagathia*, but to acquire an eristic ability that enables the pursuit of unlawful *hedone* with impunity.[19]

18 For Themistocles, see Ehlers 1966, 14-20; Humbert 1967, 225 and Plácido 2010, 122. For Miltiades, see esp. the fragments and testimonies of Aeschines of Sphettus' dialogue *Miltiades*: Pentassuglio 2017, 116-23 (see the commentary in Pentassuglio 2017, 184-205). Plato criticises Themistocles and Miltiades (together with Pericles) at *Grg*. 503c f.

19 As I claim in another paper (Stavru 2023, 29-32), a paradoxical feature of the Weaker Speech is his eristic *discipline* (*askesis*). The paradox outlined by Aristophanes lies in the fact that eristic discipline enables one to *satisfy*

It appears that Socratic education is not counterposed to the values and behaviours propounded by the Stronger and the Weaker Speeches. On the contrary, the two speeches stand for different stages of Socratic education. Both represent notions of education that are characteristic of fifth century Athens. On the one hand, Socratic education is the evolution of the educational system propounded by the Stronger Speech (i.e. the age-old education of the 'Heroes of Marathon'); on the other, it is the bedrock of a new education specific to the Weaker Speech (i.e. the education of the younger generation, such as that of Socrates' most renowned pupil Alcibiades). It is important to pinpoint that the two educational systems being addressed in this section of *Clouds* are connected: the Stronger Speech is *old* because it precedes, but in some way it lays the foundation for the *new* Weaker Speech.

The contest between the two speeches is evidence of the rapid evolution of Athenian *paideia* in the second half of the fifth century. This evolution relates to the power of *logos*: thanks to elenchus and dialectics, Socrates and the Sophists are able to refute and eventually to overthrow the conventional values of the Athenian past. Socrates' most talented and daring pupils, one of whom is Alcibiades (others include some of the most unprejudiced Sophists, such as Thrasymachus and Callicles),[20] go even further: their ability to establish a new ethics based on the law of the strongest goes hand in hand with the ability to pursue unlimited *hedone* and material goods – if necessary, even by violating the rules and laws of the city.

Both ancient and modern scholars have pointed out that the contest of the two speeches should be understood as a parody of a Protagorean doctrine, as well as an attempt to attribute to Socrates

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the "needs of nature", but, by doing so, it rules out the traditional idea of discipline (i.e. *sophrosyne*) – which on the contrary *tames and inhibits* these very "needs of nature". Thus, within the logic of the Weaker Speech, sophistic *askesis* and *hedone*, far from being counterposed, are reciprocally linked – while for the Stronger Speech *sophrosyne* and *hedone* are poles apart.

20 Alcibiades and Thrasymachus are mentioned in connection to Socratic education in another Aristophanic comedy, namely *Daitaleis* (performed four years before *Clouds*, in 427): see 205 KA. On *Daitaleis*, see Cassio 1977; Segoloni 1994, 111-93; MacDowell 1995, 27-9; Papageorgiou 2004; Rusten 2011, 301-7.

a typical sophistic method.[21] According to the *scholia recentiora* to *Clouds* (at 112b), the contest of the two speeches features a Protagorean doctrine that Aristophanes relates to Socrates.[22] In *Rhetoric*, Aristotle attributes to Protagoras the claim of "making the weaker argument stronger" (1402a24-8 = DK 80 A 21).[23] This fits with Protagoras' idea, according to which reality is contradictory. Eudoxus explicitly connects the doctrine of the weaker speech with the possibility of developing two opposite speeches about the same subject (Stephanus Byzantius *Ethnica* s.v. *Abdera* 1.18.13-4 Billerbeck = DK 80 A 21). Thus contradiction is unavoidable: "on every matter there are two counterposed speeches" (DL 9.51 = DK 80 A 1).[24] Eristics consists in the ability to argue for either one of them alternatively, and to make the *weaker* speech prevail. This ability can also be traced back to another major sophist, namely Gorgias (DK 82 B 11-11a). In fact, it should be noted that in the second half of the fifth century BC "antilogies" (i.e. opposing speeches on the same subject), were employed not only by sophists such as Protagoras, Gorgias, Prodicus and Antiphon, but also by playwrights such as Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes, and even by historians such as Herodotus and Thucydides.[25]

21 For allusions to Protagoras and other sophists in *Clouds*, see Navia 1993, 21-57; Schiappa 2003, 110-13; and Konstan 2011.

22 Cp. *Scholia in Aristophanem* 1.3.2, 224 Koster.

23 The link to Protagoras is attested also in later authors. For Cicero, defending the weaker cause was a typical feature of Protagoras, as well as of other sophists such as Gorgias, Thrasymachus, Prodicus, and Hippias (*Brut.* 8.30-1). According to Seneca, Protagoras claimed that it is possible to argue about the same subject in opposite ways (*Ep.* 88.43 = DK 80 A 20). Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 6.8.65.1 = DK 80 A 20) and Diogenes Laertius (DL 9.51 = DK 80 B 6a) both point out that the idea according to which there are two opposing speeches about every possible topic goes back to Protagoras. The two books of *Antilogies* Diogenes Laertius attributes to Protagoras fit into this picture (DL 9.55 = DK 80 A 1), as well as the anonymous *Dissoi logoi* (DK 83).

24 On the Protagorean technique of the opposing arguments (esp. DK 80 A 1 and A 4), see Radermacher 1951, 39-40; de Romilly 1992, 75-81; and Schiappa 2003, 89-102.

25 For a survey on the antilogies in the fifth century BC, see Rossetti 2023, who discusses the evidence of some 30 different antilogies going back to these authors.

Several fourth-century authors also deal with eristics. In Plato's *Gorgias* (456c), oratory is defined as a competitive skill, thanks to which persuasiveness prevails over competence.[26] According to Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* (11.25), making the Weaker Speech stronger consists in providing an appearance of truth in what is false. In Isocrates' *Antidosis*, lies can prevail over truth by making weaker arguments stronger (15-16). These examples show that the empowerment provided through sophistic *logos* consists in the ability to transform a weak argument into a strong one through eristics, as Aristophanes points out in the contest between the two speeches.

3. The Stronger Speech's Lack of *Logos* and his Surrender to the Weaker Speech

It soon turns out that the Stronger Speech lacks any argument able to defend the values he propounds. He praises virtue by recalling an example of ancient myth. Peleus, a mortal, managed to marry a beautiful goddess, Thetis, just because of his *sophrosyne*. The Weaker Speech refutes the Stronger Speech by pointing out that Thetis left Peleus exactly because of *sophrosyne* – since, from Thetis' point of view, this virtue was nothing but a lack of sex drive, i.e. Peleus had been unable to satisfy her. This refutation leads to a role swap between the two speeches: the Weaker Speech starts lecturing the Stronger Speech. The Weaker Speech moves on to the next argument: what would the Stronger do in the case that "necessities of nature" move him to commit adultery? How would he deal with the situation should he be caught?

26 In *Apology* (at 18a-c) Plato recalls the idea of "making the Weaker speech the stronger" by referring it to Aristophanes' *Clouds*. It appears that Plato (and, after him, other ancient authors) is pointing here at the contest between the two speeches – that is, to *Clouds* 2 and not to *Clouds* 1, which did not feature that contest (as argued above, n. 4). Since we know that Plato had at his disposal both versions of *Clouds* (see Dover 1968, lxxxv), we must surmise that for some reason he picked the text of *Clouds* 2 instead of that of *Clouds* 1 – although (at 19c2) he seems to refer to the version staged in 423 (on the possible reasons for Plato's preference for *Clouds* 2, see Segoloni 1994, 56-8).

πάρειμ' ἐντεῦθεν εἰς τὰς τῆς φύσεως ἀνάγκας.
ἥμαρτες, ἠράσθης, ἐμοίχευσάς τι, κᾆτ' ἐλήφθης.
ἀπόλωλας· ἀδύνατος γὰρ εἶ λέγειν.

[(The Weaker Speech to the Stronger Speech) I will move on to the necessities of nature. You've erred, you've fallen in love, you've had a bit of an affair, and then you've been caught. You're done for because you're not able to argue. (1075-7, trans. Sommerstein adapted)]

The Weaker Speech claims that the Stronger Speech, though sticking to *sophrosyne*, is unable to tame the "necessities of nature" – probably for the reason we saw before, i.e. because he is sexually repressed. Sooner or later, he ends up committing adultery: it is only a matter of time. Once caught guilty, he is unable to defend himself because of his lack of rhetorical prowess. This inability leads him to admit defeat. Eventually, the Stronger Speech surrenders to the Weaker Speech because he lacks *logos*, i.e., the rhetorical prowess that is necessary to live a life of *hedone*. Since the Stronger Speech is unable to argue, he must learn rhetorical abilities from the Weaker Speech. Only by doing so, he will be able to confront the offended husband:

ἐμοὶ δ' ὁμιλῶν
χρῶ τῇ φύσει, σκίρτα, γέλα, νόμιζε μηδὲν αἰσχρόν.
μοιχὸς γὰρ ἢν τύχῃς ἁλούς, τάδ' ἀντερεῖς πρὸς αὐτόν,
ὡς οὐδὲν ἠδίκηκας· εἶτ' εἰς τὸν Δί' ἐπανενεγκεῖν,
κἀκεῖνος ὡς ἥττων ἔρωτός ἐστι καὶ γυναικῶν·
καίτοι σὺ θνητὸς ὢν θεοῦ πῶς μεῖζον ἂν δύναιο;

[If you become my pupil, you can indulge in nature, leap and laugh, not consider anything shameful. If by chance you give in to adultery, this is what you will reply to the husband: that you have done nothing wrong. Then transfer the responsibility to Zeus, saying that even he is weaker (*hetton*) than love and women, and how can you, a mortal, be stronger (*meizon dynaio*) than a god? (1077-81, trans. Sommerstein adapted)]

The Weaker Speech invites the Stronger Speech to become his pupil. This will enable him to overcome the traditional notion of shamefulness (*aiskhron*) so as to be free to embrace a life of pleasure – and thus satisfy the aforementioned necessities of

nature. Then, the Weaker Speech puts his rhetorical ability on display. He demonstrates to the Stronger Speech how to get away with adultery. The argument goes that the mightiest of all gods, Zeus, is weaker than his love for women. Therefore, why should a mortal be stronger than Zeus, and thus be able to resist the temptation of pleasure? (1080-2) The Stronger Speech admits his weakness: on the one hand, the pleasures he feels are stronger than his chastity and his virtue; on the other, he is unable to deal with the consequences deriving from his inability to tame them. In fact, the Stronger Speech surrenders not only to pleasure, but also to the Weaker Speech, who proves to be more skilled than him in getting away with unlawful sexual behaviour. But the Stronger Speech still has doubts: will the rhetorical ability he is going to acquire suffice to avoid public punishment? By no means: he will incur the typical punishment for adultery: his pubic hair will be plucked out with the help of hot ash and a radish will be thrust up his ass (1083-4).[27] The Stronger speech regards this treatment as the worst possible evil. The Weaker Speech shows him that such punishment is not an evil but, on the contrary, the mark of sexual unbridledness. The most distinguished Athenians – lawyers, tragedians and politicians – are all "wide-assed" (1088-93), providing proof of the fact that they all live a life devoted to pleasure. The Weaker speech then also points out that *the great majority* of the public is "wide-assed" (1098-100: *poly pleionas . . . tous euryproktous*).

This entails that most Athenians pursue unlawful *hedone*, without caring about the consequences. In the light of this, the Stronger Speech switches sides: at the end of the contest, he takes off his cloak[28] and goes over to the side of the Weaker Speech (1102-4).

27 Aristophanes hints here at the practice of *raphanidosis*, a typical punishment for adulterers: see Dover 1968, 227; Del Corno 1996, 314-15 (for further details, see Kilmer 1982, 106-7).

28 The Stronger speech pulls off his cloak as Socrates' pupils do when entering the *phrontisterion*: see 177-9 (where the sudden absence of a pupil's *himation* implies not only that Socrates has stolen it – possibly in order to get something for himself and his associates to eat – but also that the naked youth has become his follower; for more on the cloak theft, see Gelzer 1956, 68-9 and Meynersen 1993); 497-501 (Socrates asks Strepsiades to take off his cloak in order to become his pupil); 856-7 (Strepsiades tells Pheidippides that

Conclusion

The Stronger Speech undergoes a transformation. At the beginning of the contest, he claims to be virtuous and chaste. At the end, he is naked and ready for pleasure. Since he is unable to tame his sexual desire, his stance is paradoxical: he pretends to be *strong* even if he is *weaker* than the pleasure he claims to control. At the end of the contest, this paradox becomes even more evident. It turns out that the majority of Athenians – including the most distinguished of them – do not even *claim* to be *stronger* than pleasure. On the contrary, they openly declare their *weakness*, i.e. their sexual debauchery (*euryproktosyne*). Therefore, the Stronger Speech is also *weak* for political reasons: only a minority of old outcasts share his view. Last but not least, the Stronger Speech's *weakness* is also evident from the ethical viewpoint since he stands for a *sophrosyne* that is unable to deal with *hedone*, making it useless and outdated. Thus, the Stronger Speech turns out not to be the *stronger* side, but it is actually the *weaker*.

We have also seen that the triumph of unlawful hedonism celebrated by the Weaker Speech does not match Socratic education but should instead be understood as an evolution of it. Whilst the Stronger Speech's claims about virtue and chastity appear to be groundless when he is confronted with *hedone*, the eristic power of rhetoric provided by the *askesis* of the Weaker Speech allows the unlimited satisfaction of all possible temptations. Aristophanes conceives the *rule of the strongest* propounded by the most radical of Socrates' students (such as Alcibiades), as well as by some of the Sophists (such as Thrasymachus), as the full accomplishment of Socratic ethics. He therefore criticizes Socratic education as a whole: by pointing out the weakness of the Stronger Speech on the one hand, and the strength of the Weaker Speech on the other, he shows the paradoxical features of such education at all its stages.

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his cloak has become thought); and 1498 (Socrates' pupils recall the theft of Strepsiades' cloak).

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